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ABSTRACT

Interactive theater is a performance based medium which utilizes drama to present and provide a forum for the discussion of socially sensitive issues which impact youth and adults. A scene is presented to an audience up to a crisis point, at which time the audience asks cast members questions while the cast stays in character. Interactive theater can be the catalyst to begin discussions of issues which are not always talked about in public. Scripts, sets, and costumes are not used, and performance environments are not a major concern. Workshops are available to train cast members in basic theater skills. Audiences have grown in personal awareness levels, and they have had the opportunity to hear what their peers think about the issues presented and discussed. Cast members have grown in many ways, from performance skills to interpersonal relationships. (RS)

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INTERACTIVE THEATER

Performance Based Awareness and Education

ED 378 625

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GENERAL PHILOSOPHY:

Interactive Theater is a performance based medium which utilizes drama to present and provide a forum for the discussion of socially sensitive issues which impact youth and adults in all communities. Participants learn both the facts surrounding a topic area and the performance skills needed to effectively present the topic in dramatic form.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

After a scene has been selected by the cast members and directors it is presented to the audience. The scene is only presented up to the crisis or conflict point, at which time the audience is brought into the performance. The audience is given the opportunity to ask the cast members questions while they stay "in character". No scripts, props or special costuming is required. Interactive Theater is a medium which can be presented anywhere, a stage is not a requirement. This medium is as effective in the classroom as it is on stage or in any other environment. It is

important to remember that the presenting cast members must be heard by the audience so provisions must be made for that. Presentations are appropriate for all age groups and are as effective for students as well as community groups and organizations. A minimum of two adult directors are required for implementation and on-going activities and performances.

PROJECT GOALS:

The goals of Interactive Theater are to present to the largest number of people possible sensitive issues which impact all communities and to provide a forum for discussion of those issues. Interactive Theater performances do not claim to be therapeutic or to offer the "answers" for community problems. Interactive Theater can be the catalyst to begin the discussion of these issues which are not always talked about in the public light. Many times this is all it takes to raise awareness, educate and brainstorm for possible solutions to the identified issues. A cast, once selected, needs to be trained in basic theatre skills. Workshops are offered for this purpose and are very cost effective. Workbooks are provided at

these workshops and participants learn about the various areas in Interactive Theater. Time is always a concern, but in order to present the best possible performance rehearsal is an important consideration. Audition time, rehearsal time, travel time, performance time and cast maintenance time need to be considered. It has not been unusual for the developer to invest five or more hours per week in the medium of Interactive Theater. That is not what all casts invest in time however, most casts look at a considerably smaller investment.

RESOURCES:

As previously mentioned scripts, sets, costumes and the like are not utilized in Interactive Theater. Performance environments are not a major concern. I have been involved with casts who have performed in large auditoriums and in small classrooms. Performances have been held in Elk's Halls and restaurants, gymnasiums and offices. The time commitment has been discussed but it is important to highlight that individual casts will make many of the decisions as to their own involvement. Casts will notice, once they get started, that many of the decisions they make will

determine their goals and objectives for their period of involvement. If a decision is made to participate in the Interactive Theater Workshops I provide, the cost breakdown is as follows:

1 Day Workshop	$150.00 plus round trip travel
2 Day Workshop	$250.00 plus round trip travel, lodging and meals

One day workshops certainly provide basic skills for implementing Interactive Theater in a school and are recommended. Sometimes a group of schools wish to share the cost and have a two day workshop. Round trip travel is computed from Rockland, Maine to the workshop site and return. All aspects of Interactive Theater are covered in the workshops and they are performance/activity based. Participants do not sit through hours of lecture, they do receive a brief overview and are then encouraged to put what they have learned into practice. This has been well received and proven to be a highly successful program for dozens of schools throughout the State of Maine. Schools have benefitted from the workshops even though they have not been able to form a cast, they were able to get closer together as individuals.

CONCLUSION:

Having been involved in hundreds of Interactive Theater performances over the years, it has been interesting to watch the reactions of the audiences served as well as the cast members involved. Audiences have grown in personal awareness levels, through education they have received factual information, and they have had the opportunity to hear what their peers think about the issues presented and discussed. Cast members have grown in many ways, from performance skills to inter-personal relationships. Interactive Theater has proven to be a powerful medium and I have been most fortunate to have been involved. The rewards of Interactive Theater are many, recognition will be received from administration, audiences, other schools and classes. Seeing people make positive changes due to the information presented in the performance based medium of Interactive Theater will provide the greatest of all recognition and awards, the intrinsic reward of realizing that you have made a difference in someone's life. What greater accolade.